

RSU 56 Board of Directors Minutes
Board Meeting Amended Agenda- June 27, 2023- 6:30pm
(This meeting will be held at Dirigo High School.

School Board Members Absent: Natalie Sneller, Angela Cushman, Peru (Vacancy)

Also Attending: Jim Thurston & son, Corinna Lee, Nicole Couture, Cameron Carpenter,
Mike Nolette

Barbara Chow, Board Chair, opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance at 6:30pm. Audience introductions were made. Everyone on zoom and YouTube were welcomed. Bruce Ross was honored for his many years of service for serving on the school board. He was given a pen set and a cake.

Motion to add the following:

VIII Supt Report: New hire (to be considered first under New Business although listed under new hires) and one resignation, reporting of new hire and resignation

CONSIDERATION OF THE MINUTES

- Motion: L. Whittington
Not Voting: D. Whittemore
Motion Carried

A few audience members spoke out against the possibility of the school board putting a rating system on books in the library.

K. Arsenault- (Library Ed tech)- The following statement represents the local librarians of RSU 56 including both our district library staff and our local library. The purpose of this letter is to partition against the rating system for the school district. Implementing such a system would go against the professional practices of librarians across the country and may be considered a violation of our students first amendment rights if challenged in court. A similar proposal was recently voted down by the state legislature. She went on to say that the board had received some letters that gave more information and not just the opinions of the librarians. She also spoke about district Policy IJJ which was being reviewed by the board for this purpose. Spoke on the policy. She said there are no materials in the library that are obscene by law, nor do they seek such materials as part of their selections. The libraries in the district have been very busy this year. If a rating system is implemented the students will be deterred from using the library as a result of restricting content as they will no longer feel that we trust them to make their own decisions about what to read. If a parent is concerned about what their student is or isn't reading, then we urge them to communicate regularly with their student about their reading habits. We can trust parents and students to make their own decisions about what they read and what they believe. Implementing a district wide rating system which locks books behind a mature label would be allowing a small group to dictate what is appropriate for all, which is a task that we fundamentally disagree with as library professionals. Signed by the Kristin, Cindy Petherbridge and Corinna Lee (Dixfield Library).

L. Nolette- Addressing the school board about why creating a rating system is a poor decision. Book ratings like this requires that someone make a judgment about the content of the book and that rating will not be objective. It also is impractical. Which books are ok to have in the stack and which should be removed. How do you define sexual content? What about biology books? How graphic is too graphic? Who gets to decide and why? We already have policies in place for parents to object to books, so this is an unnecessary step to take. Additionally, red flagging books for content that is controversial, objectionable or otherwise designating it as something negative hurts the kids whose lives lived experiences and identities are reflected in those books. She went on to speak that banning some books could truly hurt some kids and could also be defined as censorship. She asked the school board not to limit the students but to help them engage in a wide range of literature which has been selected by our professionally trained staff based on the literary value of the text.

N. Couture- Lived and worked in the River Valley for over 30 years as both an educator and a health care professional. These two careers share many similarities. We should not be micromanaging the people who know more about their fields than we do.

COMMUNICATIONS

We received a letter from the town of Dixfield thanking us for allowing them to use the Dirigo High School gym for voting. They were very impressed with our custodial staff and everyone who helped them get set up. They said things ran smoothly, and they were very thankful for that.

We also received a letter from Wynter Gittings, Maine Association of School Libraries, addressing concerns about instituting a rating system in school libraries, as well as outlining the professionalism of our current library staff. We are indeed fortunate to have Cindy Petherbridge and Kristin Arsenault at the helm of our libraries.

We received an email from Heidi Broomhall in support of e-sports. We also received an email from Zack Berry in support of e-sports.

Pam has forwarded these all to the full board so they have full access to the entire emails or letters.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Motion to approve computation and declaration of budget votes from June 13, 2023
Bruce Ross made a motion and read the motion: VOTED: That the Computation and Declaration of Votes dated June 27, 2023 and attached hereto be approved.
FURTHER VOTED: That the Computation and Declaration of Votes be entered upon the records of Regional School Unit No. 56
FURTHER VOTED: That a certified copy of the Computation and Declaration of Votes be sent to each of the Municipal Clerks of the member municipalities within Regional School Unit No. 56.
Seconded: D. Whittemore
Motion Carried
2. **Motion to approve computation and declaration of bus garage votes from June 13, 2023**
Motion: B. Ross made a motion and read the motion: VOTED: That the Computation and Declaration of Votes dated June 27, 2023 and attached hereto be approved.
FURTHER VOTED: That the Computation and Declaration of Votes be entered upon the records of Regional School Unit No. 56.
FURTHER VOTED: That a certified copy of the Computation and Declaration of Votes be sent to each of the municipal clerks within the RSU.
Seconded: L. Whittington
Motion Carried
3. Motion to approve assessment warrants and installment schedules.
Motion: B. Ross made the motion and read: I move that the Warrant for Assessment of Tax and the Assessment Schedule and Notice of Installments for each member municipality prepared by the Treasurer for fiscal year **2023-2024** be approved and be issued in form presented to this meeting; and that the Treasurer be authorized and directed to deliver to each member municipality its Warrant for Assessment of Tax and its Assessment Schedule and Notice of Installments.
Seconded: D. Whittemore
Motion Carried
4. Consideration of e-sports at Dirigo High School
Nick K. gave a presentation on bringing e-sports to DHS.
General Facts:
One of the fastest growing sports within high schools at the national level.
State of Maine information: (07/29/22)
34 Participating schools in Maine (23% of MPA Membership)
45% of those involved in esports report that they haven't been involved in other school sponsored activities.
Reported annual operating budget between \$500 and \$3,000. (Fractional cost compared to other programs offering similar benefits)
There are Grant Opportunities that are available as well for MPA Member Districts but are not guaranteed.
More than 200 postsecondary institutions are offering more than \$20,000,000 in scholarships.
*All information provided by MPA communications.

Benefits from ESports: Student Engagement:

Developing Lifelong Skills:

Time Management

Leadership Skills

Communication Skills

Etc.

Teamwork:

Only TEAM Based leagues

Success demands strong & clear communication skills sought out within daily living

Conceptual Thinking:

Superior execution/strategizing

Quick/Adaptive creative problem skill development

Sportsmanship:

Competition allows for failure

Strategies/techniques must be learned & utilized to cope with failures and to rebuild

*All information provided by Maine High School Esports/PlayVS

Benefits from ESports: Scholarship Opportunities:

Opportunities:

More than \$20,000,000 available for scholarships on national level

More than 200 postsecondary institutions nationally offering esports

State of Maine & New England area scholarships available

State of Maine

Partial list of

Institutions

Offering Esports

University of Maine System

University of Southern Maine

Central Maine Community College

Eastern Maine Community College

Northern Maine Community College

Southern Maine Community College

York County Community College

Bates College

Thomas College

Husson College

University of New England

Saint Joseph's College of Maine

Additionally, participants are exposed to the technology and game design scenes at events, tournaments, conventions, etc.

Benefits from ESports: Career Pathways

Individuals do not need to become professional gamers within this field

Gaming Industry Value: +\$140,000,000,000

Esport programs provide opportunities for involvement and connection within the industry

PRODUCTION GAME DESIGN ART ENGINEERING INTERNSHIPS

And Many More

*All information provided by Maine High School Esports/ PlayVS

Projected Outcomes:

Participants will develop critical thinking skills, communication, collaboration, and creativity in order to achieve and sustain success.

Provide environment for participants to work on their academia together.

With easy access and a lower cost to entry, esports creates an all-inclusive environment for all participants.

Research shows that engaged students perform better within academia. Esports has the ability to appeal and engage a wider audience to ensure increased performance within academia.

ESports Summary:

Career Opportunities, Character Development, Sense of Community, Scholarship Opportunities, Increase Engagement, Embodies Iste Standards, Steam Engagement

Without Requesting any increase on budget for the 2023-2024 Academic year based on *Grant* Opportunity.

Note: Previous Communications state that the request must be submitted by the End of July to receive funding for the upcoming academic year.

Nick then opened it up to the board for any comments and questions.

There were some questions and concerns from some of the board members.

Some concern was that esports are not necessarily athletic based. Nick explained that they were not but are all team based. There is not a single level, it has to be a team based program.

There are some games that are already sanctioned games.

There was a concern that guidelines should be outlined. Nick replied that since esports is MPA sanctioned, the coaching staff still goes through the same type of credentials that any other athletic program has to.

Another asked about getting a grant. Nick said it is always a risk when applying for a grant.

He believes there is enough opportunity for the district to get grants and be able to not request a budget increase for next year in order to offer esports.

How long is the esports season? Nick replied: 2 different seasons. One being the fall season and one being the spring season. The fall season, pre-season began on Sept 5th-Regular season ended end of Nov. Playoffs in Dec. Spring Season: end of Jan- ends early April- Playoffs Mid April

A board member asked about if the grades of the students would be watched? Nick replied yes
Funding: Will this be revisited each year? Number of participants? Money? Again Nick replied Yes, this would be looked at each year.

This would happen after school. There would be no traveling involved.

Are there any schools within the 50 mile radius participating? Yes, Spruce Mtn, Oak Hill and one other. Spruce Mtn has had a great turnout with it. No issues at all

Have the students been surveyed to find out interest? Nick said he has not, he wanted to present the information to the board first before doing so.

There was a concern with how much a student may “practice” at home. Nick replied that he would hope that this will give the parents, coach, AD to have an opportunity to communicate with the student and work together so they may not be gaming in excess.

Motion: T. Kelly made a motion to authorize the AP/AD to pursue the e-sports program

Seconded: D. Whittemore

M. Young felt that she was not able to support the program until she had more of the questions answered.

Nick apologized for not having all the answers to questions. He said that all the information he has received from schools, MPA, etc there has been no negative. He feels the concerns even without esports are there and this gives an opportunity to help students learn healthy limitations. Feels the benefits are high within the esports.

Opposed: M. Young

Motion Carried

5. Review of Policy IJJ (Library media selection)

Barbara brought the policy forward to see if the board wanted to review/revise the policy. It was brought up at the last board meeting around a possible rating system on books in the library.

L. Kelly: Has no problem with the policy. The rating system was brought up from listening to people in the community that had concerns about different topics in the library, some being in sexual nature or violence. It had nothing to do with any population. She appreciated everyone that came and talked. She does agree that it is up to parents if they have concerns to voice their concerns. If a parent has a concern about what's in the library is there a way they could opt their child out? Reply: The library is used as a resource. The library is not used as a class. High school students do not have a set time they go to the library. They are able to utilize the library during a learning lab, etc...noone is forced to take out library books.

L. Whittington- his understanding was that a particular board member wanted a rating system? She replied that she was asking about rating if something had violent nature and such. She was asking if anyone from the board was interested in that.

He replied that the state legislature did not pass a rating system. Went on to state that the school board cannot remove books from a library. Better things to do as a school board than to implement a rating system.

She replied she was not about banning books at all.

C. Lueders feels our librarians are doing a great job.

B. Ross- We hire these people to oversee these programs. We allow them to do their jobs.

6. Second Reading of Policy ADAA- School System Commitment to Standards for Ethical and Responsible Behavior

Motion: B. Ross

Seconded: L. Whittington

Motion Carried

7. Second Reading of Policy EEAEAA-R- Drug and Alcohol Testing of School Bus Drivers Administrative Procedure

Motion: B. Ross

Seconded: L. Whittington

Motion Carried

8. Second Reading of Policy IHBAL- Grievance Procedure for Persons with Disabilities

Motion: B. Ross

Seconded: T. Kelly

Motion Carried

OLD BUSINESS

1. Region 9 Updates (Bruce Ross/ Brian Keene)

Nothing new since last meeting

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT AND CORRESPONDENCE

Superintendent's Report: Pam Doyen

Pam spent the last two days at the Commissioner's Conference. The focus of the conference ranged from the future of public schools to school safety to developing systems to address the educator and school staff shortage. There were some good topics being discussed.

Has some concern that we may need a mid-summer board meeting to address any hiring. Teacher candidates may not be willing to wait until August 22nd if we do need to hire any of them. May need to at some point make a call around and at least do a zoom meeting if necessary.

Wants to report that the annual board training is set for the 5pm prior to the August 22nd meeting. All members should attend. New members must attend as it is a required training.

Administrator's Report: Heidi Connelly, Director of Special Services

Special education legislative updates:

LD 98, a bill to increase the age of eligibility and update special education terminology was tabled.

UPDATE: LD 98 was passed and is no longer tabled. It may or may not be signed by the governor, but unless it is vetoed it will become law before the next school year. Based on the decision of an IEP students can potentially be eligible to remain in school until their 22nd birthday.

The State of Maine special education procedural manual (MUSER chapter 101) is currently being revised with stakeholder meetings scheduled. One thing this will do is ensure that the state of Maine is in line with all federal regulations as it relates to special education.

End of year information:

- Total students in special education at the close of this school year was 132.
- I am happy to share that this school year we had 8 students who met their IEP goals and are now fully mainstreamed with their general education peers.
- Dena Littlehale, an ed tech at the high school, has worked hard with students all spring to create a garden behind the old central office. Students have been involved with growing seedlings through the entire process and will be using some of the crops to work on cooking skills which also integrate math and reading skills.
- Student who graduated from high school this year who was reading at a mid 3rd grade level when entering as a Freshman worked really hard during her specially designed instruction with the use of the Corrective reading program and graduated with a mid 7th grade level according to progress monitoring tools/cold reading assessments were done to monitor progress twice a month (see Peggy notes). Fluency has increased to a degree that allows this student access to instructional manuals, instructions from doctors, applications, other important documents.
- We officially have a staff member trained as a trainer in Step up to writing curriculum who will be training special education teachers and ed techs this Fall.

As we look toward next year the following areas will be focused on:

- Creation of a behavior skills lab at DES to support students with the skills they need to be able to join their general education peers as much as they are able.
- Restarting the community work options for students with disabilities at the high school level. This was something in place before COVID (see Peggy notes)
- Ed tech professional development program will be rolled out with the use of the Master Teacher platform and the Maine Access to inclusive education resources.

- Nationally 64% of students with disabilities spend 80% of their day or more in the general education setting according to the US Department of Education. I have not run the numbers for our district but we do support inclusion when possible with the use of accommodations which provide students with the tools needed to access general education based on their disability and modifications
 - Progress on IEP goals will be closely monitored with progress monitoring tools a minimum of once a month to ensure that growth is being made for all students.
- C. Lueders asked if we have any 21/22 yr olds in the school system. Heidi replied we do not but we will be having a few in the upcoming years.

New Hires:

Cameron Carpenter, TWK Dirigo Middle School World Language or Social Studies, 1 year ESSR position

Motion: T. Kelly

Seconded: L. Whittington

Motion Carried

Reporting of New Hires:

Patrice Parker, DES Ed-Tech III

Kathy Robbins, Bus Driver/Custodian - 1 year ESSER

Stipended and Coaching Positions:

Sonya Arsenault, Civil Rights Advisor at DES

Dirigo High School:

Cross Country Running Coach: Gunnar Bradbury

Field Hockey Varsity Coach: Gretchen Curtis

Field Hockey Junior Varsity Coach: Erin Wainwright

Football Varsity Head Coach: Craig Collins

Football Varsity Assistant Coach: Chris Whitney

Football Junior Varsity Coach: Kelly Wells

Golf Head Coach: Chandler Redmond

Soccer Varsity Coach Girls: Chris Araujo

T.W. Kelly Dirigo Middle School:

Cross Country Running Coach: Alan Tacheney

Field Hockey Head Coach: Stacey Gilbert

Field Hockey Assistant Coach: Alexis Holman

Soccer Varsity Coach Girls: Yami Hamalainen

Soccer Varsity Coach Boys: James Hamalainen

Resignations/Retirements:

Christine Lothrop, 20 hr/week BGT

Sherry Hu, World Language Teacher, DES/TWKDMS (ESSER funded)

Transfers:

Terri Williams, Substitute Bus Aide/Floating Ed-tech III, 1 year paid with ESSER

COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. Student Representative Report- N/A
2. Policy Committee- A new "Public Participation at board meeting" policy coming out. Another policy being revised.
3. Finance Committee- Nothing to report
4. Curriculum Committee- Nothing to report
5. Buildings & Grounds Committee- Bus Garage & a new bus
6. Negotiations Committee- Nothing until next year
7. Personnel Committee- The AD is working on job descriptions for coaches
8. Ad-hoc Committee- Nothing to report

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

B. Ross- Very happy to see that we are going to be finally building our own bus garage. It is something Bruce started looking into with Kenny a number of years ago. Took the slow process of getting funding and getting money put aside. It's a win win situation for the district.

B. Chow- Marianne Young-You've been with us from the beginning...you keep coming back which is good.

M. Young- Been here from the beginning, off and on. It really has been a privilege.

D. Whittemore- Thank Bruce. When I came out Bruce helped me out very much on the board. We're going to miss him

C. Lueders- Thank Bruce for being a calm voice of reason and experience.

L. Kelly- Thank you Bruce

L. Whittington- When I first started on the board, Bruce took me aside a few times and said "you can't do that"...for the most part Bruce has been someone to look up to, someone you can respect and someone that when he speaks you listen. You will be missed.

ADJOURNMENT

1. Motion to adjourn

Motion: B. Ross

Seconded: M. Young

Motion Carried

Meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm